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ABSTRACT

The Instructional Development Division of Utah State University has developed a conceptual model of institutional renewal. The model assumes that a program based on effective and systematic interaction of all parts of an instititon will be successful and that any model of self-renewal must be eclectic rather than dogmatic. A further assumption is that renewal should strike at the basic unit of the institution, in this case, the academic department. The model has five stages. The first is designed to create general awareness among faculty members about innovations and strategies for improvement by disseminating literature, conducting seminars, and using video recorders. Stage two supports faculty initiative by offering competitive grants for improvement of instruction. Faculty development is the third stage which is supported by instructional development grants. Entire departments work on department development as the fourth stage. The final stage is a maintenance stage wherein consultation help is offered to maintain personal development projects. (CH)

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A DESCRIPTION OF A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

BY J. STEVEN SOULIER

PURPOSE

As is the case with many educational innovations, institutional renewal has been plagued with a good deal of confusion concerning the essence of the concept. The practice of institutional renewal has outstripped its theory base and we are left with a condition where meaningful criteria for evaluation is lacking, and hypotheses for refinement and application of the concept are nearly non-existent. It is therefore important that conceptual models be developed which are comprehensive enough to provide a description of a fuller process of institutional renewal. The conceptual model of institutional renewal presented in this paper has been implemented at one institution; it is built on key aspects of the sociology of institutions and may provide a base upon which other institutions can launch similar renewal efforts of their own.

RATIONALE

Five years ago, Utah State University launched an effort which has resulted in the development of an Instructional Development Division, that has the responsibility of improving instruction at that institution. The Division has developed a conceptual model for bringing about institutional renewal. A detailed evaluation has occurred, which is supportive of the conceptual model. The design and results of the evaluation study is described in two companion papers.

IR003 483

The present model, then, is based not only on the logic of the original authors of the program, but it also withstands the scrutiny of five years of practice and a culminating evaluation of that practice.

PROCEDURES

A variety of institutional renewal innovations help form this particular conceptual framework. Considerable research into the nature of the academic environment in institutions of higher education, and strategies of plan change, proposed by such people as Rogers, Gubba, Likert, Havelock, etc., are at its base.

Some of the assumptions upon which this model is built include: synergy, ecleticism, self determinism and self initiation. It is assumed that a program based on effective and systematic interaction of all of the relevant parts of the institution will be more successful than a program based upon haphazard or non-interaction of those components. A learning resources program created out of the various divisions of an institution such as media services, audio visual services, photography, printing, evaluation, and so forth, will be superior to a program where these subcomponents are not interrelated in any meaningful way.

A second assumption was that any model of self-renewal must be eclectic rather than dogmatic. Tying the model to a particular educational technology principle, or to a particular strategy of change, was considered improper because of the vulnerabilities of those technology principles or change strategies. It was assumed that the University organizational hierarchy does not set policies or tell people what to do, on the contrary, the faculty operates on the assumption that they are their own experts. The administrator's job is to enable the faculty to perform their work.

Another key assumption is that renewal should strike at the basic unit of the institution. Originally, the model considered the instructor first, since it is he or she who controls the selection and presentation of learning cues to students. By an existing reward structure, or through power of research information, or by student feedback, the individual professors may be encouraged to take their own initiative for improvement.

People who initiate change and innovation are more likely to implement that change, and institutionalize the new organization once the change has been successful.

Since few changes take place without financial and peer support, a second basic unit, the academic department, was considered critical to the process. In the highly decentralized organizational structure such as found at Utah State University, the financial power lies at the department level. Not only is the financial power at this level, but the aspect of peer reinforcement and recognition is strongest at this point. Without such reinforcement it is highly unlikely that any major instructional renewal could survive.

RESULTS

Due to the particular assumptions mentioned earlier, the conceptual model which is described below was developed, implemented and evaluated.

STAGE I

The first step of the model was designed to create general awareness among the faculty members concerning instructional innovations and potential improvement strategies. The necessity for this stage is brought on by the assumption that faculty members in general are not trained educators, but are trained professionals in highly specialized fields. For most, it is

difficult enough to find time to read and keep up with changes in their own field, let alone in the changing innovations of education. The general awareness stage was conceived to capsulize instructional information while acting as a clearing house for more in-depth information on request. Relevant literature was sent to faculty members or academic departments; an introductory handbook on teaching and teaching improvement ideas was created and distributed to each faculty member; and regular seminars, each devoted to a specific teaching approach such as self-paced instruction, or how to run a seminar, etc., were conducted on regular intervals. Self-awareness was also considered important to this stage. Through the use of a portable video recorder, faculty members are given the opportunity to see themselves teach without threat of peer or student critique, promoting self-initiated awareness and renewal. These and other implementation strategies, made up the awareness component of the institutional renewal model.

STAGE II

The second step of the model was that designed around supporting faculty initiative. The support stage, characterized by competitive grants, is offered to all faculty members on campus. The grant has a specific social value in higher education. A person who receives the grant has immediate status, and thus, the grant is considered rewarding. At the same time, upon receipt of the grant, the person has to commit himself to certain kinds of output. These grants are announced, made competitive; and a council is established to referee them.

Although the grants are modest in their amount, between $200.00 and $500.00, they do cause improvement of instruction to take place. What is asked for in these small grants is that the faculty invest their time in

designing learning strategies. In addition to the granting program, the second stage of support includes consultation to faculty members on certain problems, such as testing, evaluation and media support.

Stage III

The third stage of this strategy is a faculty development stage. The emphasis here is on the faculty member becoming totally involved in the instructional development process. To accomplish this the Division offers larger faculty development grants, which may run between $2,500.00 and $4,500.00. This enables a faculty member or faculty team to work about a year, designing, producing and evaluating a project. The department must contribute half of the faculty members salary for release time one quarter and the Division provides the other half. Again, it is the faculty or department who initiates the idea.

Stage IV

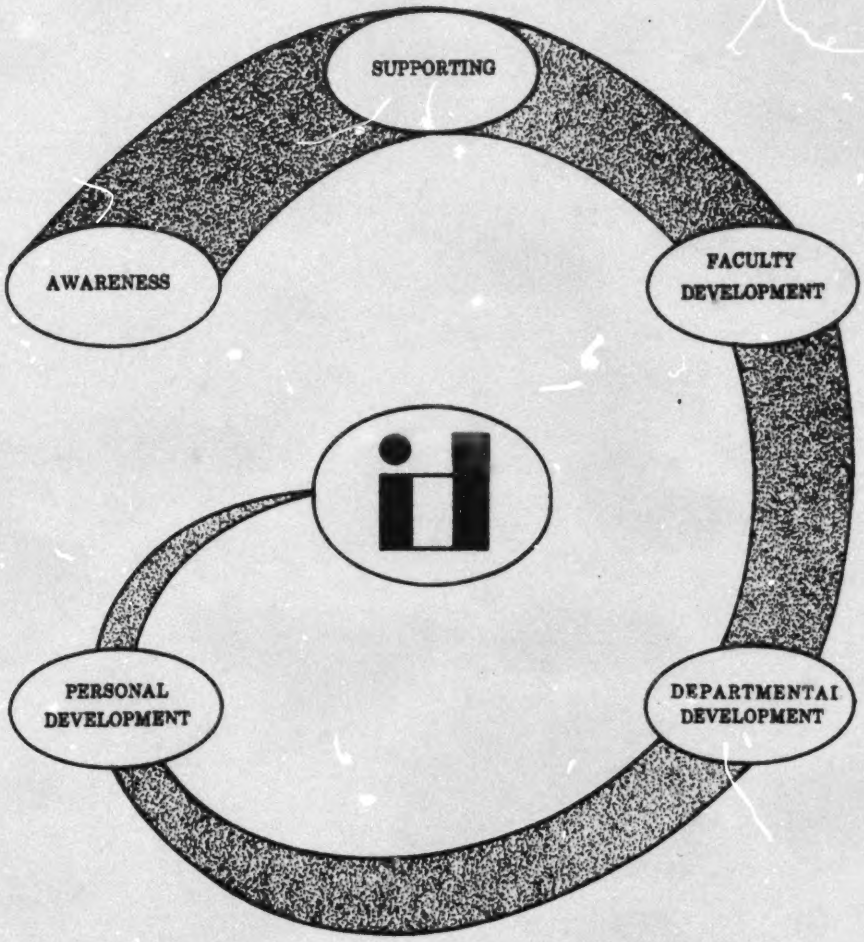
As an extension of the third stage, the departmental development stage includes working with entire departments on department redevelopment. It focuses rather heavily on Instructional Development, although much attention is given to changes in the social environment of learning. This fourth stage overcomes some of the problems inherent in the third, by allowing the developer to work within the goals of the department. The consultant acts as a process person and a referee. He may intervene, and may sometimes challenge a conceptualization of a content specialist, but normally, he attempts to lead task orientation to the redevelopment effort.

Stage V

STAGE V

The final stage in the model might be described as a maintenance stage. The overall objective of the first four stages of the model was to prepare the faculty and institution to become self perpetuating renewal centers. As this fifth stage is achieved, only a minimal amount of consultation help is required to keep personal development projects going. The initiative is now totally on the shoulders of the individual. While, at times, it may be necessary to pass again through one or more of the earlier stages, the process of self renewal should be firmly ingrained in the individual and institutional renewal is well on its way to becoming a reality.

In conclusion, it would be fair to say that the model of institutional renewal described in the paper has enjoyed modest success. (To be reported in a separate paper) The awareness, support, instructional development, departmental development and personal development stages have emerged from a small program with limited resources. Despite the lack of grandeur associated with the program, the program has won acceptance of the faculty, and is making some limited in-roads to improving teaching and learning at a medium sized university.



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